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USSR Review

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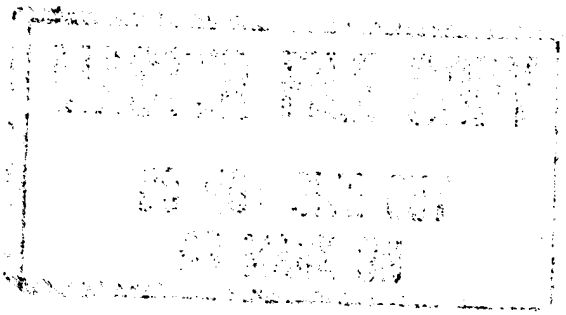
July-August 1985



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The Soviets and the Middle East

Perspective 25X1

1985 marks three decades of active Soviet involvement in the Arab world. The arms deal the Soviets concluded with Egypt in 1955 was their first with an Arab country and amounted to a declaration to the Western powers that the USSR was ready to compete for influence in the Middle East beyond the non-Arab "Northern Tier" of Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan, where Moscow had been involved for decades. 25X1

The Soviet Union has achieved considerable influence in the Middle East. Its success is largely due to its ability to exploit Arab security concerns and supply major military equipment quickly, in sufficient quantity and at competitive rates. More than once, because of US domestic considerations or Western inability to provide sufficient levels and types of arms at affordable terms and in a timely fashion, the Soviets have been the supplier of last resort. 25X1

Beyond the bordering Northern Tier, however, the Soviet position remains inferior to that of the United States. The rapid progress Moscow made in the Arab world in the 1950s and 1960s was followed throughout the early and mid-1970s by one major setback after another. The Soviets have yet to recover from their loss of influence in Egypt and have failed to gain a voice in Arab-Israeli negotiations, two of their major goals. Moreover, the recent efforts of Jordan's King Hussein and PLO chief Arafat—backed by Egypt—to form a joint delegation for peace talks with Israel through US mediation threatens, once again, to leave the USSR on the sidelines.

The anti-US reaction of many Arabs to the Camp David accords in 1978 and to the US military presence in Lebanon in 1982-84, however, created openings that Moscow has attempted to capitalize on. The increased Soviet military presence in Syria, South Yemen, and Libya and the continued importance of Soviet weaponry to such countries as Iraq, Algeria, and North Yemen ensure the USSR a continuing foothold in the Arab world. 25X1

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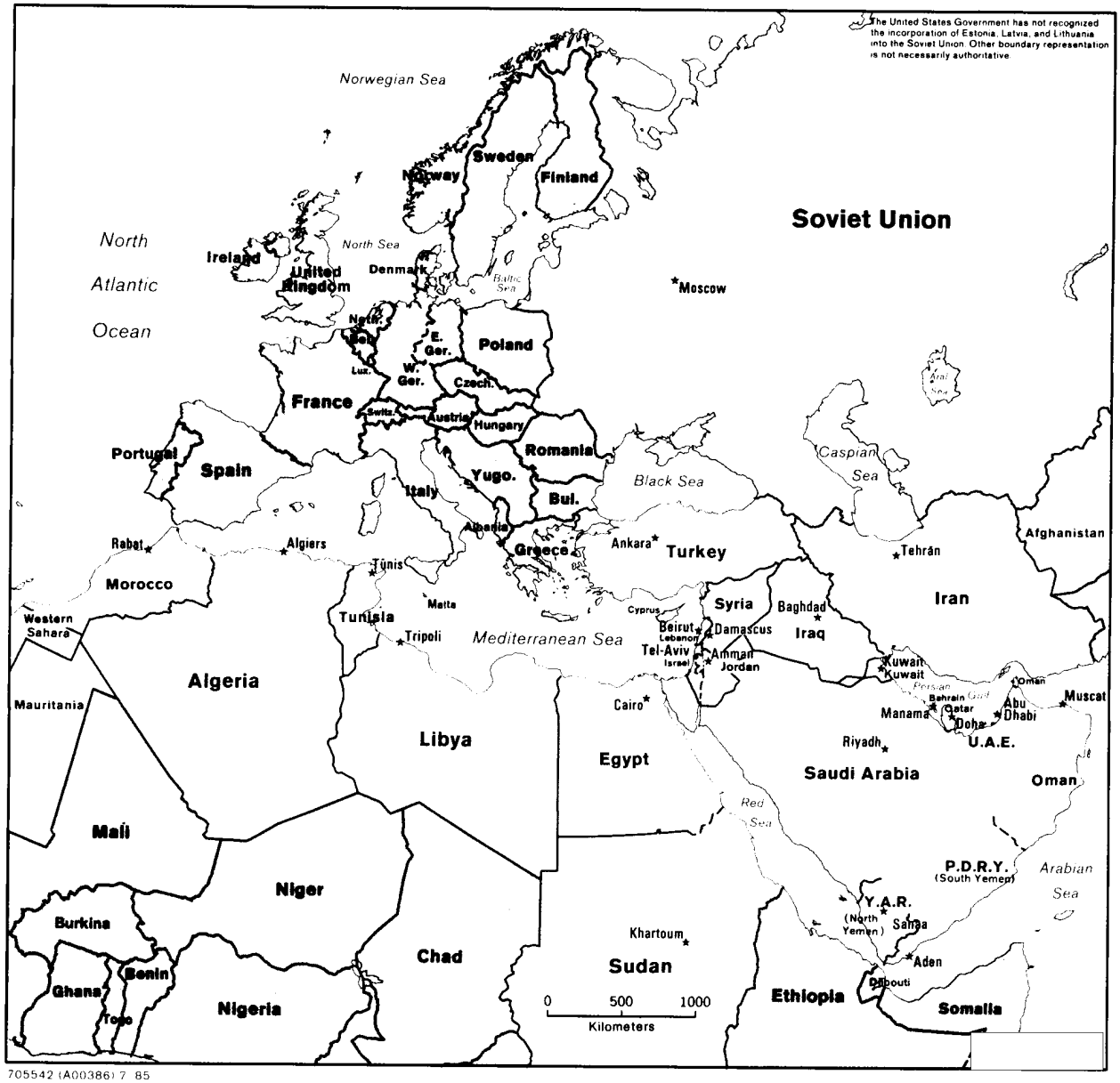

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Moscow's position in the the Northern Tier is far stronger than it was 15 years ago. The United States is shut out of Iran, and there is a Marxist regime and more than 115,000 Soviet troops in Afghanistan. Although Afghanistan is likely to remain a net liability for the Soviets for some time to come, over the longer term a pacified, Marxist-ruled Afghanistan would enhance the USSR's ability to exercise influence in South and Southwest Asia.

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The Kremlin's gains in Iran and Afghanistan have not been without costs. The most significant has been the US decision to increase its military presence not only near Southwest Asia but also in the Middle East as a whole. Washington's creation of the US Central Command (CENTCOM), its securing of access to regional ports and airfields and pre-positioning of equipment for CENTCOM, along with its increased military cooperation with Pakistan and selected Middle Eastern countries, have, at a minimum, complicated Soviet military planning for the Middle East and South Asia. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the continuing Muslim insurgency have made regional states all the more suspicious of Soviet intentions and increased their receptivity to US efforts. [redacted] 25X1

The Middle East's Importance in Soviet Strategy

Soviet interests in the Middle East stem first of all from its proximity to the USSR. Soviet officials have stressed to US counterparts that the Middle East is a Soviet borderland comparable to Latin America for the United States. Just as Washington has vital interests in Latin America, they argue, so too does Moscow have such interests in the Middle East. [redacted] 25X1

Other factors that make the Middle East important to the Soviets include:

- *Energy*. The region's vast resources of oil and natural gas make it vital to the functioning of the economies of many Western and Third World countries. The USSR, itself, is self-sufficient in oil and natural gas but frequently has found it cost effective to purchase these commodities in the Middle East or, in the case of oil, to accept it as payment for arms sales when a client is unable to pay in hard currency.[1] The decline in Soviet domestic oil production in 1984—the first since World War II—and the poor prospects for a rebound in output raise the possibility that the Soviet Union will become a major purchaser of OPEC oil by the 1990s.

- *Hard currency*. Since 1955, the Soviets have signed arms deals worth a total of approximately $66 billion with Middle Eastern states—about two-thirds of total Soviet arms sales to the Third World. Most of these customers pay in hard currency, and earnings from these sales have averaged about $5.5 billion annually during recent years, or approximately 15 percent of total Soviet hard currency earnings.

- *Islam*. Besides the natural concerns any country has with its bordering regions, the USSR has the added concern that the Middle East contains religious and ethnic kin of Soviet citizens. The approximately 45 million Soviet Muslims—primarily of Turkic and Iranian ethnic origin—by and

[1] The Soviets resell virtually all of this oil. [redacted] 25X1

large have not been a major security threat to the Communist regime since it subdued the Central Asian Basmachi rebels in the early 1930s. The vast majority of Soviet Muslims are Muslims by tradition rather than practice. Since the late 1970s, however, signs of increasing religious awareness among Soviet Muslims, coupled with the upsurge in Islamic fundamentalism across the border in the Middle East, have prompted Soviet authorities to pay closer attention to the "Islamic factor."

- *Western involvement.* The West, along with Japan, is primarily interested in the Middle East for its reserves of oil and natural gas and geostrategic location at the confluence of Asia, Africa, and Europe. The Western economic presence in the Middle East far outstrips that of the Soviets, and the Western military presence is a prime concern of Moscow. Turkey, a NATO member, is the southeastern flank of the Western alliance, and North Africa lies opposite NATO's entire southern flank. 25X1

For all these reasons, the Soviets see the Middle East as the most important region in the Third World. The threat to the Soviet homeland from the Middle East, as a borderland of the USSR, is minuscule compared to the threats the Soviets face from Central Europe and China, opposite which the overwhelming bulk of their conventional forces and all their intermediate-range nuclear missiles are stationed. The Middle East, however, is the most volatile borderland, and for that reason it probably demands more day-to-day attention from policymakers in Moscow. The Middle East's explosiveness poses potential dangers to the Soviets because of the high stakes of both the USSR and the United States in the region and the possibility that uncontrolled events could precipitate a military confrontation between the two superpowers. At the same time, this volatility offers potential opportunities for rapid expansion of Soviet influence that are not present on the USSR's other borders. 25X1

Factors Assisting and Inhibiting Soviet Progress

There are various factors working to Soviet advantage in the Middle East. The Arab-Israeli dispute, Israeli assertiveness, and the close US-Israeli relationship sustain Soviet offers of security assistance and enable Moscow to charge the United States with backing Israel and ignoring Arab interests. Other regional rivalries, such as the war between Iran and Iraq, Syrian-Iraqi differences, Libyan-Egyptian tensions, North-South Yemeni disputes, as well as the national ambitions of leaders such as Libya's Qadhafi, also provide the Soviets with an entree to the region. 25X1

But the numerous factors working to limit Soviet advances have predominated over the years. These include Moscow's inability to affect a solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute (in large part because it has no leverage with Israel), longstanding Arab antipathy to Communism and suspicion of Soviet intentions, the legacy of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Arab

nationalism, rivalries between Soviet friends, and a lack of economic appeal. Despite 30 years of effort, Moscow does not have a client in the region that can compare with Cuba or Vietnam in terms of cooperation and compatibility. Only South Yemen and Afghanistan are headed by Marxist regimes, and there do not appear to be obvious candidates for leftist revolutions elsewhere in the region, with the possible exception of Sudan. [redacted] 25X1

Uncertain Prospects

It remains to be seen what effects the recent changes in the Soviet leadership will have on Moscow's policy toward the Middle East. Neither General Secretary Gorbachev nor Foreign Minister Shevardnadze has experience in dealing with the Middle East, although Shevardnadze has traveled there and has ruled the party apparatus in a republic bordering the region. [redacted] 25X1

At a minimum, President Gromyko's departure from the Foreign Ministry should allow Gorbachev and Shevardnadze to take a fresh look at Soviet policies toward the Middle East. The setbacks Moscow suffered in the region after 1970 appeared to leave a bitter taste in Gromyko's mouth. He often adopted a condescending, abrasive tone in his talks with regional friends and adversaries alike and never failed to berate his Arab counterparts for their inability to end their blood feuds. In recent years, Gromyko spent relatively little time on Middle Eastern issues. The only countries he ever visited in the region while Foreign Minister were Egypt and Syria, and his last trip was in 1980. [redacted] 25X1

Thus far into his tenure, Gorbachev has not shown any special interest in the Middle East. However, the determination he has displayed in [redacted] 25X1
[redacted] comments to force the United States to treat the USSR as an 25X1
equal suggests that he will insist at least as adamantly as his predecessors that Moscow be included in any regional negotiations. [redacted] 25X1

In addition to the Afghan problem, the most pressing issues facing the new Soviet leadership in the Middle East are how to:

- Prevent Jordan and PLO chief Arafat from entering peace negotiations with Israel through US mediation and with no role assigned to Syria and the USSR.
- Reunify the PLO on an anti-US basis and mend the rift between Arafat and Syrian President Assad.
- Unify the Arabs into a radical, anti-US front by ending the isolation of Moscow's closest "allies" in the region, Syria, Libya, and South Yemen.
- Prevent Egypt from drawing other Arabs into a moderate, pro-US front that is willing to negotiate with Israel and is cool, if not hostile, toward the Soviet Union.

- Increase Soviet influence in Iran or, at a minimum, ensure that a successor to the Khomeini regime does not move back toward Washington.
- Maintain the gains made with Iraq since 1982 without crimping Moscow's ability to seize opportunities in Iran.
- Capitalize on US setbacks in Sudan and Lebanon.
- Stem Algeria's drift away from overwhelming dependence on Soviet weapons.
- Develop greater access to moderate regimes in the region.
- Erode Turkey's security ties with the United States. 25X1

Policy Options

Barring a change of regime, Syria is likely to remain the bulwark of the Soviet position in the Middle East throughout the rest of the decade (see "The Soviet-Syrian Relationship: Centerpiece of Moscow's Middle Eastern Policy"). Moscow and Damascus continue to have sharp differences on a number of issues—especially Syrian attempts to control the PLO—but a shared objective of preventing any resolution of the Palestinian question that excludes either state is likely to lead them to minimize differences and continue their marriage of convenience during the next few years. 25X1

The Soviets, however, could decide that Syria's dependence on Soviet arms gives them room to maneuver in terms of new approaches to the Arab-Israeli problem (see "Soviet Policy Options in the Middle East"). The USSR might:

- Float yet another Arab-Israeli peace initiative.
- Intensify efforts to improve relations with Egypt (see "Soviet-Egyptian Relations: Limited Prospects for Improvement").
- Resume efforts to court Jordan's King Hussein.
- Increase support for the Arafat faction of the PLO.
- Accelerate efforts to strengthen contacts with various political forces in Lebanon (see "Soviet Policy in Lebanon: Moscow Hedges Its Bets").
- Improve communications with the Israelis. 25X1

Just as Egypt is the key Soviet target in the Arab world, so Iran is in the Northern Tier (see "Moscow's Tough Line Toward Iranian Overtures"). The most likely course under Gorbachev is a continuation of the current uncompromising Soviet position toward Tehran, but he might contemplate more innovative and risky policies. On the one hand, the Soviets could increase pressure on the Khomeini regime and provide more active support for opposition elements. On the other hand, they could take Iran up on its overtures for better relations with the hope of improving their position inside Iran and positioning themselves well to capitalize on Khomeini's eventual departure from the scene. 25X1

In the broader Persian Gulf region, the Soviets almost certainly will continue to court the conservative Gulf regimes but could simultaneously step up efforts—through South Yemen—to subvert those same governments. Similarly, Moscow could decide to take a more active role in Libyan subversive efforts, particularly in the unstable Sudan (see "The Soviets Probe for Openings in Sudan"). [redacted] 25X1

All of these alternative policies carry risks for the USSR, both in alienating existing friends, such as Syria and Iraq, and in provoking local and US responses. Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, however, after a thorough policy review, may eventually decide that the general stagnation of Soviet policy in the Middle East since the early 1970s demands that such risks be run.

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Soviet Policy Options in the Middle East

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Gorbachev's accession to power and the shift of authority to a new generation of leaders almost certainly will have an impact on Soviet policy in the Middle East. At a minimum, Soviet policy will be invigorated by the infusion of new personalities. New ideas and approaches should be generated and impetus given to existing policies. Shifts in emphasis and policy may well emerge over time. The new Soviet Foreign Minister will want to know why Soviet policy in the Middle East has not moved off dead center since the Soviet ouster from Egypt in the 1970s and will be looking for ways to improve Moscow's position.

Soviet Objectives and Policies

The Soviets will continue to pursue their broad objective in the Middle East—the enhancement of their own influence and presence at the expense of the United States. They will seek closer ties to key regional states such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iran while preserving their current links to Syria, Libya, and Iraq. They are both supported and frustrated in their efforts by the constantly shifting environment in which they operate. New initiatives with respect to a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the chaos in Lebanon, the protracted war between Iran and Iraq, the unpredictable Qadhafi, and the impact of Islamic fundamentalism all seem to offer opportunities for Soviet advances—but all contain inherent pitfalls as well.

Moscow's successes in the Middle East to date have derived almost entirely from its ability to supply military assistance to clients involved either in conflict with Israel or in disputes with their neighbors. Moscow's primary clients will continue to be leftist and radical states, but it also will push arms sales to moderate Arab states (such as Jordan and Kuwait) that are disgruntled with a perceived lack of US support. The moderates are willing to purchase Soviet military equipment but tend to limit their dealings with Moscow to avoid both a pervasive Soviet presence and an angry US reaction.

The Soviets also seek to expand the base of their position in the Middle East by establishing their relevance to the Arab-Israeli peace process and by trying to create and lead a broad coalition of Arab states. Failing in these efforts, Moscow consistently opposes Middle East negotiations from which it is excluded.

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The Soviets are concerned that separate agreements leave them associated only with the most radical and recalcitrant Arabs and thus limit their prospects in the region. They therefore try to maintain ties to a range of actors in the Middle East. They defend the independence of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), for example, in spite of their suspicion of Arafat. Their dependence on Syria, however, prevents them from taking a strong position to defend the PLO from Syrian-backed attacks.

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Finally, the Soviets try to accomplish their aims by encouraging the establishment of leftist, pro-Soviet regimes in the region. They have provided support to Communist and other leftist elements, have tried to manipulate domestic politics in their favor, and have used disinformation and forgeries as well as propaganda to bolster their own position and undermine that of the West. They will continue such efforts and may consider intensifying them in the months ahead.

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Possible Policy Options

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As long as Syrian policy remains fundamentally compatible with that of the USSR and Syria remains dependent on the Soviets for arms, Moscow will treat Syria as the key to its position in the *Arab-Israeli context*. Should Syrian policies shift fundamentally, Moscow would adapt its position to attain maximum benefit and limit its losses. On many issues Soviet and Syrian interests already differ, however, and Moscow pursues policies that conflict with those of Syria. The

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Soviets could decide that Syria's dependence on Soviet arms gives them sufficient room to maneuver to justify new initiatives either with respect to an Arab-Israeli settlement or toward other key actors—Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinians, Lebanon, or Israel. They could:

- *Undertake yet another new initiative with respect to a peace settlement* designed to appeal to moderate Arabs (frustrated by the slow pace of negotiations) and advance their own claims that they have a constructive role to play. (Brezhnev's original outline for a settlement of the conflict, advanced in 1981, has already been modified to include an acknowledgment of a new Palestinian state's right to form a confederation with Jordan.) The Soviets could repackage their call for an international conference under UN auspices to address an overall settlement.

- *Renew their calls for US-Soviet cooperation* (possibly at the summit in the fall) to help resolve the dispute—and advance these calls more vigorously in Western Europe. The Soviets might hope that the French and other Europeans would in turn put pressure on the United States to include the USSR in any discussions.

- *Accompany a peace proposal with a renewed diplomatic offensive* designed to distract attention from US efforts. There has not been a high-level Soviet visit to the Middle East since Gromyko traveled to Syria in 1980. Shevardnadze, who visited Algeria in 1984, might well put the Middle East high on his list of potential trips.

- *Intensify efforts to improve relations with Egypt,* hoping to discourage Egyptian leadership of a new moderate Arab coalition. While it is unlikely that Moscow would agree to forgive Egypt's military debt, given the unwanted precedent this would establish, it simply could proceed without resolving the issue. This might open the way for deliveries of spare parts and, possibly, the establishment of a military attache's office in Cairo.

- *Resume efforts to court King Hussein,* which were interrupted by his peace initiative and their own strong opposition to it. They could reissue their invitation for him to visit Moscow and offer further sales of sophisticated arms, following up on recent deals involving air defense systems.

- *Increase support for the Arafat faction of the PLO,* while supporting those leftist elements—the DFLP and the PFLP—that are seeking to pull Arafat away from the peace process. They will certainly continue trying to arrange some accommodation between Syria and Arafat.

- *Accelerate efforts to strengthen contacts with various political forces in Lebanon,* particularly Walid Junblatt's PSP, and to bolster the Lebanese Communist Party in order to create future options independent of the Syrians.

- *Take initiatives designed to improve communications with the Israelis,* by taking advantage of the Labor Party's desire to increase the emigration of Russian Jews to Israel. Moscow would hope thereby to enhance its credibility as a participant in the negotiating process. [redacted] 25X1

Any of these steps would be opposed by Syria, particularly while the US-backed Hussein initiative remains extant. Should the initiative collapse, however, Moscow might believe that it could afford to distance itself from Syria and work to expand its options. It would certainly try to avoid having to make a choice between any of these initiatives and its relations with Syria. If forced to do so, however, it would continue to give priority to its Syrian ties. [redacted] 25X1

As long as the Hussein initiative is alive, the Soviets and Syrians retain a strong, mutual interest in undermining it and in maintaining pressure on those involved. While the Soviets apparently were unpleasantly surprised by Syria's movement of troops to the Jordanian border in 1980, they did not actively oppose the move and probably would acquiesce in such Syrian action again if Jordan were on the verge of reaching an accommodation with Israel. Moscow's own direct ability to prevent a settlement, however, remains as limited as its ability to attain a solution. [redacted] 25X1

In the *Persian Gulf–Arabian Peninsula region,* the Soviets continue to believe that Iran is the major prize and will remain open to any opportunity to advance their position. The current Soviet line with respect to Iran and, more broadly, Islamic fundamentalism, is very negative, however. Whereas, in the early days of the Iranian revolution, the Soviet attitude toward fundamentalism was ambivalent and the potential for leftist gain was stressed, Soviet writing currently depicts fundamentalism as working against long-term leftist interests. As a deputy chief of the CPSU International Department, Rostislav Ul'yanovskiy, wrote in the May issue of the party journal *Kommunist,* the ruling clergy of Iran has "managed for a certain time to slow down and brake the inexorable march of historical progress."

The new Soviet leadership may well decide that the Islamic regime is so hostile to Soviet interests that increased pressure and active support for opposition elements is warranted. The Soviets may believe that Tehran will not turn to the West under any circumstance and that, consequently, the risk is negligible. They therefore may feel they can concentrate on rebuilding the Tudeh Party, trying to link it to other leftist elements in Iran. They thus would prepare for Iran's eventual collapse into anarchy. Under this scenario, Moscow would not want to prop up the present regime by giving it economic, political, or military support of any kind. This is the direction Soviet policy currently appears to be leaning.

The new Soviet leadership could decide to change course, however, and to respond to Iranian overtures positively, hoping for a real improvement in relations:

- Moscow could return its technicians to Iranian projects, be accommodating in economic talks, ease restraints on clients such as Libya and Syria with respect to arms deliveries, and agree to deliver some lesser weapon systems to Iran itself.

- The Soviets will continue arms deliveries to Iraq and will support Iraqi calls for an end to the war whether or not they respond favorably to Iranian gestures. Moscow might hope, however, that improved ties to Iran would give it more leverage with Baghdad, which has moved closer to the West and to the moderate Arabs in recent years.

In the broader Gulf region, the Soviets will continue efforts to improve their bilateral ties to the conservative states of the region. The Iran-Iraq war has set back their efforts as the Gulf states have looked to the West and to each other to bolster their security position. But Moscow will hope to capitalize on the view recently expressed by Bahrain's Prime Minister—that the Gulf states would benefit from having ties to both superpowers:

- Moscow could refloat initiatives such as its proposal for an international conference to discuss Persian Gulf security or its frequent calls for the establishment of nuclear-free zones in the Persian Gulf or the Indian Ocean.

- It could renew diplomatic efforts designed to draw the Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, into a dialogue.

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Moscow, on the other hand, could again urge the use of subversion and insurgency against the conservative Gulf states. Although such activities undermine efforts to improve bilateral relations, the Soviets have frequently pursued such a two-track policy in the past. The hiatus in such activity since the 1970s has resulted from a number of factors—not least of which has been South Yemen's pursuit of respectability and economic assistance.

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the Soviets may agree with internal Yemeni critics that Aden's current policy has not paid off. Although they apparently still support President Hasani, the Soviets might encourage South Yemen to reduce efforts to improve ties to its neighbors and to return instead to support for radical Gulf elements seeking to undermine existing regimes:

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- Moscow could renew attempts to subvert Oman, urging South Yemen to resume active support for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLO).

- Similarly, the Soviets could encourage South Yemen's backing of military action by the National Democratic Front, directed against North Yemen.

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Moscow has subordinated such activity to its courtship of the North Yemeni regime in recent years, seeing its long-term leverage against Saudi Arabia best served by strengthening bilateral ties to Sanaa. Soviet concern that the North will be looking increasingly to the West because of recent oil discoveries by a US firm could prompt it to move in this direction. [redacted] 25X1

A Soviet decision to goad South Yemen into a more militant posture would reflect a shift in policy emphasis that might also be evident elsewhere in the Middle East. Libyan leader Qadhafi is scheduled to visit Moscow this fall, and the signing of a Friendship and Cooperation Treaty at that time might indicate greater Soviet willingness to be identified with, and thus to encourage, Qadhafi's efforts to destabilize other states in *North Africa*. This might involve increased Soviet support for the southern insurgency in the Sudan or for Libya's efforts to advance its interests in Chad.

[redacted] 25X1

The Soviets could also try to piggyback on Libyan policy in the Maghreb. Should Algeria continue to distance itself from the Soviet Union, Moscow could try to upgrade its relations with Morocco, exploiting the Libyan-Moroccan union and its own economic relationship with Morocco. While Moscow has typically been wary of tying its own policies too closely to those of the unpredictable Qadhafi, it may decide that the potential for gain outweighs the possible losses.

[redacted] 25X1

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The Soviet-Syrian Relationship: Centerpiece of Moscow's Middle Eastern Policy

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Syria has been the linchpin of the Soviet position in the Middle East since the USSR's loss of influence in Egypt in the early 1970s. The Soviets' relationship with Syria—by far the most powerful Arab "confrontation" state opposing Israel—has provided them entree into the Middle East and influence in the region's most important conflict: the Arab-Israeli dispute. Moscow and Damascus have been drawn together by some common objectives as well as the USSR's lack of alternative avenues of influence in the region and Syria's lack of alternative sources of military support. The relationship is one of necessity, not mutual affinity or ideological compatibility.

Shared Objectives

The most important objective the USSR and Syria share is to prevent Israel and the United States from achieving separate peace settlements between Tel Aviv and each of its Arab neighbors. Accordingly, Moscow and Damascus strongly oppose such "separate deals" as the Camp David accords and the Arafat-Hussein agreement of February 1985. The Soviets are against such partial settlements because the United States historically has been the broker and they have been left out. The Syrians believe they and other Arabs can only get a satisfactory deal from Israel (and this only *after* they achieve military parity) if they negotiate as a bloc and resolve the major issues simultaneously.

Military Backing: The Tie That Binds

The dominant factor in the Soviet-Syrian relationship is Moscow's willingness to provide military support. The Soviets have delivered more weapons to Syria than to any other Third World client (approximately $15 billion worth through 1984). The USSR and its East European allies provide Syria virtually all its arms, and, in recent years, Damascus often has been the first to get newly exported versions of Soviet weapons.

The volume and quality of Soviet weaponry delivered increased significantly between 1979 and 1983, especially after the 1982 war in Lebanon. After Syrian losses from that war were replaced, deliveries dropped off sharply in 1984 (a 47-percent drop in tonnage compared to 1983). The decline probably will be only temporary.

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Beyond the approximately 3,000 Soviet military advisers and technicians with Syrian forces (see inset), the USSR has had some independent military units of its own in Syria. The most significant were the two SA-5 surface-to-air missile units the Soviets sent to Syria in early 1983. There were some 2,000 Soviet personnel manning the complexes at Hims and Dumayr until they began leaving in October 1984.

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there are 50 to 100 Soviet advisers and technicians left at each complex and they—along with the Soviets at air defense headquarters in Damascus—maintain a key role in command and control. Final say over firing the missiles, however, probably has been turned over to the Syrians. Other Soviet units in Syria include:

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- A detachment of Hip J/K electronic countermeasures helicopters at Al Mazzah airfield outside Damascus.

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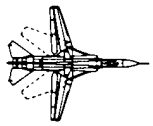
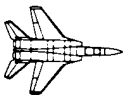
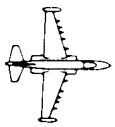
Figure 1
Selected Weapon Systems the Soviets Might Provide Syria During the Rest of the 1980s

	Description	Introduced in Soviet Forces
Air/Air Defense Systems		
SA-10	Transportable, medium-range (100 km) SAM. Newest, most capable Soviet system. Effective against aircraft at all altitudes. Radar can be used with other SAMs against low-altitude targets.	1980
SA-11 	Mobile low-to-medium altitude, medium-range (30 km) SAM.	1982
MIG-27 Flogger D/J 	Improved MIG-23 ground attack aircraft with greater payload and better navigation system. J variant equipped with laser range-finder and target designator.	1975/1978
MIG-29 Fulcrum 	Latest Soviet combat aircraft. Designed for close air-to-air combat. May also serve as a fighter-bomber. Only small number produced thus far.	1984
SU-25 Frogfoot 	Latest Soviet ground attack aircraft. In use with Soviet forces in Afghanistan and delivered to Iraq in 1985.	1981
Ground Force Systems		
T-80 	Latest Soviet medium tank with gas turbine engine, improved armor protection, and better mobility than earlier tanks. Able to fire antitank guided missile through gun tube.	1981
Naval Systems		
F-Class Submarine 	Diesel-powered attack submarine. Already exported to several countries outside the Warsaw Pact.	1958

Note: Data based on information available as of July 1985.

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Soviet Military Advisory Presence

To assist the Syrians in operating and maintaining equipment, as well as to train them in general military tactics and doctrine, the Soviets maintain approximately 3,000 military advisers and technicians in Syria. They are present at virtually every level of the Syrian armed forces, from battalion to general command.

Economic Aid

Soviet economic assistance to Syria has been highly visible but, when compared with Arab aid, relatively modest. Since the late 1950s, the Soviets have focused their assistance on such large-scale projects as the Euphrates hydroelectric complex, the Tartus-Hims railway, the Syrian oil industry, and land reclamation. Today there are approximately 1,000 Soviet economic technicians working in Syria. Moscow has extended about $2 billion in economic credits since 1957. (By way of comparison, Arab government disbursements to Damascus in 1981 alone amounted to $1.8 billion.) The Soviets did not extend any credits to Syria between 1976 and 1983, but the more than $1 billion provided since then and the recent negotiations over building a nuclear power reactor and research center are leading to a major expansion of Soviet economic involvement in the country.

The Syrian Quid Pro Quo

In return for this assistance, the Syrians have granted the Soviets some access to the ports of Tartus and Latakia and the military airfield at Tiyas. The Soviet Mediterranean Squadron makes regular use of the support facilities at Tartus. In 1983 and 1984, Soviet ships made far more port calls in Syria than in all other Mediterranean ports. The Soviets have used Tiyas airfield since 1972. They deployed two IL-38 antisubmarine warfare and naval reconnaissance aircraft there for the first time in 1981 and have done so five times since 1983 on what now appears to be a regular basis. Longer range TU-16 Badger reconnaissance aircraft also deployed to Tiyas in 1981 and have flown there twice so far in 1985. 25X1

Outside the military sphere, the Soviets receive Syrian support in international forums on many issues, including Afghanistan and Moscow's perennial "peace" offensives. In addition to the hard currency the Soviets earn from arms sales to Syria, the Syrians also apparently give Soviet bids on economic projects in Syria preferential consideration. 25X1 25X1 25X1

Limited Soviet Influence

Despite the wide scope of their presence in Syria, the Soviets have limited ability to affect the Assad regime's policymaking in matters of importance to Syria. Soviet officials have stated, 25X1 that Moscow is unable to exert decisive influence over Assad and regards him with considerable mistrust. 25X1 25X1 On the one occasion when the USSR is known to have attempted to use its military relationship to pressure the Syrians to change their policy—during Syria's military intervention in Lebanon in 1976-77—it failed.[1] Damascus, in retaliation for Moscow's cutback on arms deliveries, threatened in January 1977 to bar Soviet use of the port of Tartus. Assad's threat eventually led to a resumption of arms shipments. 25X1 25X1

The USSR's lack of ability to influence key Syrian decisions stems from real differences over regional policy. These differences in turn foster the mutual

[1] The Soviets strongly opposed the Syrian intervention on the side of the Christians against the PLO and Lebanese leftists. 25X1

distrust that has marked relations since Assad's seizure of power in 1970. Both sides have kept each other in the dark over the years about major issues

This lack of consultation evidently continues. Soviet officials have frequently complained during the past few years that Damascus does not discuss with them its policy in Lebanon or contacts with the United States. Moscow, for its part, did not brief the Syrians fully on the US-Soviet talks on the Middle East in Geneva in February, according to comments made by Syrian officials to US Embassy officers in Damascus.

Policy Differences

On policy issues, Soviet-Syrian differences center on the extent of Soviet military support for Syrian strategic objectives and on specific policy toward the PLO, Iraq, and, to a lesser extent, Egypt, Lebanon, and the Arab-Israeli peace process. The Soviets have claimed that a primary source of tension in the Soviet-Syrian relationship is the Assad regime's attempts to broaden the 1980 treaty to, in effect, commit the USSR to come to Syria's defense militarily in the event of war. Soon after the announcement in 1981 of the US-Israeli "strategic cooperation" agreement, the Syrians began calling for a similar accord between Syria and the USSR. They have also sought Moscow's backing for their goal of "strategic parity" with Israel.

past Soviet behavior strongly suggest that Moscow is still determined not to tie itself to a specific response in the event of another Syrian-Israeli war. The dispatch to Syria of Soviet SA-5 units in 1983 committed Moscow to Syria's defense to a much greater degree than ever before.

The Soviets, however, evidently continued to refrain from putting that commitment in writing. Moreover, we believe that, with the removal of most of their SA-5 crews, the Soviets now will be even less likely to accede to Syrian requests to formalize their security relationship. In addition, the Soviets, although determined to continue strengthening Syria, almost certainly do not believe it can attain actual military parity with Israel.

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Different perspectives on the PLO have led to some of the sharpest Soviet-Syrian differences over the past decade. Moscow has consistently opposed Syrian attempts to dominate the organization, from the Syrian intervention against PLO forces in Lebanon in 1976 to the apparently Damascus-backed attacks on Palestinian camps in Beirut this May and June. The Soviets, however, have had little success in tempering Syrian moves against the PLO and, in the most recent case, have mixed feelings because they share many of Damascus's grievances against PLO leader Arafat, particularly his joining with King Hussein in an attempt to negotiate with Israel through US mediation.

Moscow, similarly, has had no success in convincing Assad to mend fences with Iraq and Egypt. As for Lebanon, the Soviets have suppressed their misgivings about Syrian policy there since the Israeli invasion in 1982, but they still oppose long-term Syrian domination of the country.

Differing Perspectives on the Peace Process

Soviet-Syrian difficulties over the Arab-Israeli peace process have usually not been over the final terms of a settlement but over how best to obtain those terms. Moscow has sought a comprehensive settlement at an international conference that it would cochair with Washington—the solution that would give the USSR the greatest voice. Damascus refused to attend the only international conference on the issue ever held—at Geneva in December 1973—and would not support the US-Soviet call in October 1977 for reconvening the conference. The Syrians have publicly expressed support for the USSR's current effort to hold an international conference, but Syrian officials have admitted to US Embassy officers that Assad is not enthusiastic about the idea.

Despite these differences, fear that Yasir Arafat and King Hussein—backed by Egypt—are moving toward their own separate deal with Israel has led Moscow since late 1984 to tilt further toward Damascus in the Syrian-PLO dispute. 25X1 25X1

These developments underscore how closely Moscow is tied to Syria's position on an Arab-Israeli peace settlement. The Soviets cannot risk endorsing any peace initiative that does not meet Syria's objectives; if they alienate Damascus, they will have no entree into the peace process. At the same time, Moscow has not shown the ability to convince Damascus to soften its position. Thus, the Soviets are left with little choice but to follow the Syrian lead, and the Syrians appear in no hurry to engage in negotiations. 25X1 25X1 25X1

Deferring to Damascus While Protecting Long-Term Interests

The Soviets' dependence on Syria for presence and influence in the Middle East has required them to acquiesce in Syrian policies on most regional issues. As long as Syria remains so central to a continuing Soviet role in the area, we believe that Moscow will continue to adjust its policies toward other countries to mesh with those of the Syrians. The Soviets recognize that these issues are of vital importance to Damascus and will not jeopardize relations with Syria over matters of lesser importance to the USSR. 25X1

At the same time, the Soviets are well aware of the speed with which situations can change, particularly in this volatile region. Their setback in Egypt in the 1970s demonstrated the impermanence of seemingly solid bilateral relationships. Although Assad's political position currently appears to be secure, his health is fragile and his longevity uncertain. The Soviets may believe that any of his probable successors would 25X1

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pursue similar policies. Given the fact that the current regime represents a small minority of the Syrian population, however, they cannot be sanguine about this either. 25X1

Thus, while deferring to Syrian interests and modifying their policies sufficiently to avoid jeopardizing relations with Damascus, the Soviets will continue to pursue their own interests in the region. Their unwillingness to abandon Arafat demonstrates their reluctance to tie their fortunes totally to a single actor in the region. 25X1

The Soviets recognize that they too have leverage in the relationship, given Syrian dependence on the USSR for arms and great-power backing. To protect its own long-term interests in the region, Moscow, therefore, will continue to seek improvement in relations with Iraq and closer ties to Jordan, Egypt, and Yasir Arafat. It will also support those factions in Lebanon that it considers sympathetic to its interests.

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Soviet-Egyptian Relations: Limited Prospects for Improvement

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The normalization of Soviet-Egyptian relations last summer signaled a modest improvement in relations that had been cool since the early 1970s. Much to Moscow's disappointment, however, there has been little change since then.

Legacy of Mistrust

Former President Sadat's expulsion of Soviet personnel from Egypt and the turn toward the United States in the early 1970s was a severe blow to Soviet fortunes in the Middle East. In 1977 Sadat announced a 10-year moratorium on repaying Cairo's military debt to the USSR and withdrew Egypt's Ambassador to Moscow. The Soviets stopped delivering spare parts for Egypt's Soviet-built weapons.

In 1978 the Camp David accords, which highlighted Moscow's inability to influence the Arab-Israeli peace process, further soured relations. Soviet media were especially vitriolic during this period. In 1981 Sadat expelled the Soviet Ambassador, charging him with interfering in Egyptian internal affairs. Sadat's intense anti-Sovietism and the animosity between him and the Soviet leaders left a legacy of distrust that made any rapprochement virtually impossible as long as he remained on the scene.

Soon after President Mubarak assumed office in October 1981, he took small steps to normalize relations but was in no hurry to exchange ambassadors. The Kremlin was cautious but ready to proceed at any time, and it welcomed the opportunity to deal with someone other than Sadat, despite Mubarak's pledge to adhere to Sadat's policies.

Mutual Interest in Normal Relations

Soviet influence in Syria, Libya, and South Yemen has not replaced the loss of influence in Egypt, because it leaves Moscow with clients that either cannot defeat Israel militarily, such as Syria, or that are irrelevant to the dispute. The Soviets openly acknowledge that Egypt is the most important country in the Arab world, primarily because of its pivotal role in the Arab-Israeli dispute, and have devoted considerable effort to rebuilding their influence with Cairo. While it probably had few illusions that relations would ever return to the heyday of the late 1960s, Moscow expected the return of ambassadors to precipitate more rapid change than has taken place.

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Moscow is disappointed with the lack of progress in expanding ties. The Soviets have asked Egypt to reopen their consulates and return buildings seized by Sadat. They are irritated that Mubarak has requested balanced trade while ignoring Egypt's estimated $2.5 billion military debt.

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The Soviets hope to parlay Cairo's economic weakness and need for military spare parts into an opportunity for expanding Soviet influence, thus increasing their ability to play a major role in the Middle East. The Soviets' immediate aims appear to be to:

- Reduce Cairo's dependence on the United States by providing a limited alternative to US military aid.
- Undermine Egypt's commitment to the Camp David accords.
- Improve economic ties.
- Foster a rapprochement between Cairo and Damascus.

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Achievement of these goals could clear the path for closer Soviet-Egyptian ties while minimizing the risk of undercutting Soviet relations with Syria, the USSR's closest ally in the region.

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Mubarak has several reasons for normalizing relations. It helps Egypt regain credibility with Arab countries that had criticized Cairo for becoming an American "puppet"—a crucial step in ending Egypt's isolation in the Arab world.

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Mubarak appears to have every intention of limiting the Soviet presence and Soviet activities in Egypt.

Obstacles to Closer Ties

The major obstacles to better relations are the legacy of mistrust, the fundamentally different approaches the two sides are taking in resolving the Arab-Israeli dispute, the Egyptian military debt, and Soviet relations with Egypt's adversaries. Soviet media have criticized Mubarak's peace initiative, announced after the 11 February 1985 accord between Jordan's King Hussein and PLO chief Arafat. The initiative called for an international conference that would include the Soviets only after direct negotiations between Israel and a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation had reached an agreement. While an international conference is an integral part of the Soviet peace plan, the Soviets have rejected the notion that a conference should "rubberstamp" agreements already reached through direct negotiations. They almost certainly saw Mubarak's proposal as a clever, Sadat-like move aimed at undermining their role in the issue.

Moscow has publicly called the Hussein-Arafat accord and Mubarak's proposal capitulatory to Israel and harmful to the Palestinians' best interests. In an article condemning Mubarak's initiative, *Izvestiya* said it is regrettable that there are "Arab leaders" taking advantage of current tensions within the PLO and treating the Palestinian issue "as if it were small change."

Cairo's military debt is particularly irritating to Moscow. It represents a substantial amount of money, but, more important, it is symbolic of the Soviet Union's humiliating defeat in Egypt in the 1970s. Since Sadat's moratorium on servicing the debt began in 1977, no payments have been made.

the Soviets have frozen Egypt's accumulated trade credit surplus of approximately $450 million, insisting that it be applied to the military debt.

The Egyptians are also suspicious of Soviet ties to Syria and Libya and of possible efforts to expand relations with the new government in Sudan. The Soviets are limited to some extent in improving ties to Egypt by their interest in maintaining those relationships. They probably would justify any move closer to Egypt by trying to convince Damascus that they were drawing Cairo away from Washington. Moscow is less concerned about upsetting Libyan leader Qadhafi, but, while it would not allow relations with Libya to interfere with improving ties to Egypt, it would not want to jeopardize its growing military access to Libya for uncertain or marginal gains in Egypt. 25X1

Cairo is probably concerned that recent events in Sudan could lead to a Soviet- and Libyan-brokered axis among Libya, Sudan, and Ethiopia, thus surrounding Egypt with hostile countries. Moscow's interest in Sudan or in such an axis, however, probably would not override its interest in closer ties to Egypt. Moreover, although the government in Khartoum is interested in improving relations with Moscow, it would not want to be perceived as a Soviet ally in the region. 25X1

The Soviets have few exploitable assets in Egypt. The military is not generally impressed with Soviet weapons but sees the need to maintain the large inventory of equipment on hand. Soviet intelligence-gathering efforts are primarily directed toward the Egyptian military and its relationship with the United States. The Soviets probably see the military as an important power broker and source of influence in Egypt. The Soviet Embassy is in frequent contact with Egypt's leftist and Palestinian press and with the local Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization—a Soviet front—but none of these groups is very influential in Egyptian politics. Moscow also maintains contact with Egyptian Communists—there are seven illegal Communist parties—but realizes they are virtual nonentities in Egypt and would not risk heavy involvement with them while trying to improve relations with Mubarak. 25X1 25X1 25X1

Modest Improvement

The most positive aspect of Soviet-Egyptian relations has been in the economic sphere. In May the two sides signed a trade protocol that met Mubarak's call for balanced trade, 25X1 25X1

[redacted] In early July 1985 a high-level Soviet delegation went to Cairo to discuss the debt—the most extensive talks the two sides have had on the issue since the 1977 moratorium. Senior Egyptian officials told the US Embassy that the two sides failed to agree on the debt's size and on the application of Cairo's trade surplus funds to its repayment. The Soviets reportedly rejected Cairo's argument that the debt be reduced by the amount Egypt has spent on reproducing Soviet spare parts and by the rapid depreciation of the equipment. The deadlock delayed implementation of the trade protocol. [redacted]

Talks are likely to resume this fall. Moscow may consider favorably Cairo's proposal that the frozen trade surplus be applied toward the purchase of equipment to modernize Soviet-built factories in Egypt, but they probably will demand that most be used to service the debt. [redacted]

Soviet exports to, as well as imports from, Egypt have ranged in value from US $200-300 million annually. The Soviets export coal, chemicals, cast iron, and machine equipment to Egypt and import cotton, textiles, oils, and perfumes. They also participate in some economic projects. [redacted]

During 1984, presidential press passes were issued to members of the Soviet media for the first time since their expulsion in the early 1970s, giving them access to Mubarak's press conferences and presidential briefings. The number of Egyptians studying in the USSR also increased in 1984, [redacted]

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Outlook

The Soviets are likely to continue efforts to expand relations, taking advantage of Egypt's need for Soviet military spare parts and desire for increased trade. There is little else they can do unilaterally to promote closer ties, because it is the Egyptians who are being courted and who are setting the pace in the relationship. Also, Moscow could not afford to risk alienating Damascus or, to a lesser extent, Tripoli unless closer relations with Cairo were assured. They are unlikely to offer many concessions, however, especially on the debt issue. The Kremlin also will continue to oppose Mubarak's peace proposal and any other initiatives that exclude Soviet participation in an Arab-Israeli settlement, thus limiting prospects for closer ties. [redacted]

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Mubarak, for his part, is likely to continue to keep the Soviets in official channels and extend relations only to the point of satisfying Egypt's need for spare parts. He probably will be cautious about using the "Soviet card" with the United States, however, to avoid jeopardizing the even more vital US military and economic assistance. [redacted]

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Moscow's Tough Line Toward Iranian Overtures

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Since March 1982, Moscow has made it clear that any improvement in Soviet-Iranian relations must be initiated by Tehran. Iran began making overtures in the spring of 1984, but not until early this year did both sides appear to consider seriously opportunities for better ties. By June, however, the Soviets probably were convinced that prospects for closer ties to the Khomeini regime were slim, and they are continuing their tough line toward Iran.

Moscow's Tilt Toward Baghdad

The Kremlin sought closer ties to the Khomeini regime following the revolution in 1979, and particularly after Iraq's invasion of Iran in 1980, but was consistently rebuffed. Khomeini's coldness toward the Soviets as well as his consolidation of power in Tehran by late 1981 apparently convinced Moscow to reassess its policy.

A March 1982 article by *Pravda*'s leading Third World commentator, Pavel Demchenko, signaled the Soviet reassessment. He dropped the generally positive line the Soviet media usually took toward the Khomeini regime and criticized it for unfriendly actions: reducing the Soviet diplomatic presence in Tehran, closing the Soviet consulate in Rasht, unilaterally terminating cultural relations, promoting an overall anti-Soviet rhetoric in the Iranian media, and allowing Afghan rebels to operate from Iranian territory. Especially galling to Moscow was the media's equating Soviet policies with those of the United States. The Soviets were also unhappy about Iran's closing of the natural gas pipeline between the two countries in 1980. The conclusion of a $2 billion arms agreement with Baghdad in April 1982 marked Moscow's decision to support Iraq in the war and to place relations with Iran on hold until either the regime adopted a more pro-Soviet stance or a new government emerged in Tehran.

In June 1982 the Iranians pushed the Iraqis out of all but small pockets of Iran and for the first time took the war into Iraqi territory. The Soviets then began publicly criticizing Iran's stance on the war, praising Iraq's stated willingness to end it, and supporting Iraqi-inspired UN Security Council resolutions. In July a landmark *Kommunist* article by the party's senior Third World theoretician, Rostislav Ul'yanovskiy, presented the most authoritative Marxist-Leninist condemnation of the Khomeini regime and its Islamic revolution.

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Soviet Conditions

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From the fall of 1982 through the spring of 1983, relations worsened. Iranian demonstrators burned the Soviet Embassy flag on the anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Members of the Tudeh (Communist) Party were arrested and confessed (probably under torture) to charges of spying for the KGB, and the party was outlawed. In May 1983 Iran expelled 18 Soviet diplomats for ties to the Tudeh and interference in Iranian internal affairs.

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The Soviets made their policy clear when then Foreign Minister Gromyko addressed a session of the Supreme Soviet in June 1983. Gromyko noted that Moscow was "linked by friendship" with Iraq. In contrast, he said only that the USSR wanted good relations with Iran and would reciprocate if Tehran sought normal relations but also would respond appropriately if Iran had other objectives. He further criticized Iran's position on the war with Iraq by censuring those who "oppose ending it."

Since then, Moscow has stuck to its demand that Tehran take "concrete" steps toward correcting "intolerable" activities. The major conditions Moscow wants met include:

- A sustained reduction in the anti-Soviet rhetoric.
- An end to Iran's support for the Afghan rebels.
- Permission to replace the expelled Soviet diplomats.
- An improvement in economic cooperation.
- An end to the repression of the Tudeh Party.

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Moreover, the Soviets would like Iran to be more willing to negotiate an end to the war, which has led many of the Persian Gulf states to increase their security cooperation with the United States.

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Probing for Better Ties

Over the last year, Iran's battlefield failures have caused it to seek improved ties to the USSR, but not until early this year has it been willing to take any action on the Soviet conditions. We believe Tehran's objectives are to reduce Moscow's support for Iraq in the war and to acquire major weapon systems from the Soviets or their allies. Since January of this year, Iran has:

- Redoubled its diplomatic approaches to the Soviets, including a request to the Syrians to intercede with Moscow in its behalf.
- Reduced the level of anti-Soviet rhetoric in its press (although the USSR still is condemned along with the United States by clerics and the population in general).
- Whitewashed anti-Soviet grafitti from the wall of the Soviet Embassy in Tehran.
- Postponed the trial of the Tudeh members, which was scheduled for last November.

In June 1984 an Iranian Foreign Ministry official met with Gromyko in Moscow, and a Soviet energy delegation visited Iran. Both exchanges, however, were unproductive.

By early 1985 the Soviets appeared willing to test the sincerity of Iran's overtures and also took some steps to improve the atmosphere. The Soviet Ambassador, according to the Iranian media, in January initiated the revitalization of the Soviet-Iranian Joint Economic Committee, inactive since 1980. In April, for the first time since 1980, the Kremlin sent greetings on the anniversary of the founding of the Islamic Republic. An authoritative TASS statement on 4 April dissociated the USSR from Iraq's bombing of Iranian cities.

Also in early April, Gromyko received Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Kazempur-Ardebili—the highest ranking Iranian to visit the USSR in three years.

Still No Movement

Gromyko apparently continued to take a tough stance on the major obstacles to improved relations. 25X1
Kazempur-Ardebili's visit did not go well. Moreover, Korniyenko has yet to visit Tehran. 25X1
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Soviet-Iranian trade declined significantly over the last year. The revival of the Joint Economic Commission will be a test for expanding economic cooperation and improving ties in general, but the two sides have a long way to go just to restore their earlier levels of trade (see table). 25X1
most Soviet economic technicians left Iran by early June because of the Iraqi bombing of Iranian cities. (The Soviets had left a major power plant in Ahvaz for similar reasons in 1984.) The withdrawal of 1,000 to 1,500 technicians will hamper Soviet-sponsored economic projects and put yet another obstacle in the way of any improvement in relations. The Soviet-built steel plant in Esfahan appears to have been particularly affected. 25X1 25X1

Other obstacles also persist. The Soviets probably recognize that Iran's overtures are motivated primarily by its desperate need for arms and a need to end its political isolation. Iran continues to support the Afghan rebels (although tensions between the Iranians and the rebels have increased); it brokered a truce, announced 17 June 1985, among some rival Afghan Shia factions fighting the Soviets. Clerics also continue to denounce the USSR as the "other" Satan. 25X1

The National Voice of Iran—a clandestine radio station out of Baku operated and funded by the Soviets—still calls daily for the overthrow of the Khomeini regime. In late May an Ul'yanovskiy article in *Kommunist* was extremely critical of the Khomeini regime, noting that it had betrayed the 1979 revolution and even charging the clergy with profiteering from the Iran-Iraq war. In June, *Pravda* replayed a Tudeh protest calling for an end to repression by the Khomeini regime. Afghan violations of Iranian airspace continue—something the Soviets could easily stop. Moreover, Soviet support for Iraq has not diminished. 25X1 25X1 25X1

Soviet-Iranian Trade *Million US $*

	Soviet Imports From Iran	Soviet Exports to Iran
1975	371	391
1980	116	399
1981	653	567
1982	260	795
1983	509	755
1984	298	297

Source: Official Soviet trade statistics, rounded to the nearest million US dollars.

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Greater economic cooperation and even an increase in the intermittent flow of small arms, ammunition, and spare parts deliveries from the USSR, Eastern Europe, and other Soviet allies are possible if Tehran takes additional steps to meet Moscow's conditions. Although General Secretary Gorbachev's and Foreign Minister Shevardnadze's views about Iran, and the Middle East in general, are not known, the Iranians almost certainly will prefer to deal with them than with the difficult Gromyko. But a major upturn in relations, including substantial arms transfers to Iran, is unlikely. The Soviets have spent the last three years rebuilding relations with Iraq and are likely to avoid steps that could alienate Saddam Husayn, when prospects for commensurate gains in Tehran seem dim.

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The Soviets Probe for Openings in Sudan

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Moscow has actively sought to improve its position in Sudan since the fall of the Nimeiri regime in April. While cultivating the new regime in Khartoum, the Soviets also have quietly established links to John Garang's southern dissidents and revitalized existing ties to the Sudanese Communist Party. Moscow's efforts may be aided by Khartoum's perception that the USSR holds the key to a future settlement with the Garang forces.

Before the Coup

The USSR made little headway in restoring Soviet influence in Sudan during the 16-year rule of President Nimeiri. Although the Soviets succeeded in building extensive military assistance ties between 1969 and 1971, relations soured following Moscow's premature endorsement of an aborted Communist coup in mid-1971. Khartoum's subsequent crackdown on local Communists, the expulsion of Soviet military technicians in mid-1977, and growing US-Sudanese ties in the late 1970s sustained the downward slide in Soviet-Sudanese relations.

The Soviets became increasingly critical of the Nimeiri government as the United States developed a military presence in Sudan in the late 1970s. However, events in Sudan were not central to Soviet interests in the Middle East at the time, which focused on Egypt—and other states engaged in the broader Arab struggle against Israel—and on the Ethiopian-Somali conflict in the Horn of Africa.

Courting the New Leadership

The Soviets moved quickly to cultivate the new regime and gauge the extent to which it was committed to its professed desire to pursue a more "balanced" foreign policy.

Pravda correspondents subsequently interviewed the head of the new Transitional Military Council, Suwar Al-Dahab—a conversation later aired on Soviet television—as well as the new Prime Minister, Dr. Jazzuli Dafallah. The interviews focused on the "progressive" changes under way and the possibilities for closer ties to the USSR.

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These overtures were complemented by other gestures of Soviet good will. Moscow, for example, made several deliveries of relief assistance for Sudanese drought victims in April and May. The Soviet Ambassador also met with the Sudanese Deputy Prime Minister in June to discuss other economic aid possibilities.

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Soviet Media Approaches: Targeting the United States

Soviet media characterizations of the Sudanese situation also reveal Moscow's positive approach toward the new regime. In generally straightforward accounts, the media have applauded Nimeiri's ouster with a predictably anti-US twist—citing his fall as an example of what happens to Third World leaders who align themselves too closely with Washington. In discussing recent changes, the Soviets have highlighted Sudan's "democratization," namely, the release of political prisoners—including the local Communists—and its more balanced foreign policy orientation. At the same time, they also have acknowledged Sudanese statements about the need for continued economic ties to the United States.

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Soviet media themes suggest that Moscow's short-term objective is to erode US influence in Sudan. In interviews with Communist party officials, Soviet media have focused on US economic, political, and military "penetration" of Sudan under Nimeiri, and the need to cleanse the security apparatus, "which had served as the CIA's regional center from which were conducted US operations against neighboring

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countries in Africa." Similarly, the media have carried Sudanese Communist calls for the dissolution of "inequitable accords" with the United States and rejection of the International Monetary Fund's "shackling terms."

Behind-the-Scenes Maneuvering

Even while cultivating the new government in Khartoum, the Soviets have been discreetly expanding their links to various opposition groups in Sudan, largely through intermediaries.

In addition, the Soviet media have sought to burnish the Sudanese Communists' image as a leading force on the domestic scene. On 21 June *Pravda* summarized a Lebanese newspaper interview with the Sudanese party leader, focusing on the anti-US, anti-IMF themes of the talk.

the Soviet position has been enhanced by the new regime's perception that the USSR—through its ties with Ethiopia—has the necessary leverage to prompt the Garang forces into an internal settlement. This view led to the Transitional Military Council's decision in late June to send an emissary to Moscow to request a cessation of Soviet aid to the SPLA.

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Overview: Improved Soviet Prospects

The Soviets clearly recognize the potential political and diplomatic opportunities stemming from Khartoum's perception that the USSR can help end the insurgency in the south. Soviet Foreign Ministry officials have told US diplomats that Ethiopian and Sudanese support for insurgents in southern Sudan and Eritrea, respectively, "offers the chance for an arrangement." Soviet success in brokering some kind of settlement could enhance Moscow's image in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa.

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Soviet efforts to build influence in Sudan—and diminish that of the United States—probably will be abetted by Khartoum's improved relations with Libya and Ethiopia, with whom Moscow has major military ties. The Soviets may benefit from the recent Libyan-Sudanese military assistance accord, simply because it has further strained Khartoum's relations with Egypt and Washington. The Soviets might also eventually gain access to data about the Sudanese military through the Libyans.

the Soviets may already have discussed renewing military assistance with Sudanese military officers.

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At present, the Soviets probably judge that their interests are best served by the low-key, dual-track approach of cultivating the Transitional Military Council while expanding ties with various opposition forces. The current situation probably is seen as too fluid to risk choosing sides, and the Soviets are probably all the more cautious because of their precipitate moves in 1971. Moreover, blatant Soviet meddling could undercut Soviet efforts to improve ties with Egypt, a state more central to Moscow's broader regional interests.

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Soviet Policy in Lebanon: Moscow Hedges Its Bets

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The Soviets have developed contacts in the last 18 months with virtually all the major actors in Lebanon—the Druze, the Shias, leftist forces, the Lebanese Government, and, to a lesser extent, rightist Christian groups. The Soviets apparently are seeking to capitalize on the chaotic situation in Lebanon and to preserve their options for whatever occurs there.

Moscow's freedom of maneuver in Lebanon is constrained by Syrian interests and by the Soviets' need to maintain close relations with Syria, the USSR's most important ally in the Middle East. The Soviets also do not want tensions in Lebanon to escalate to the point of sparking a return of Israeli forces.

Another constraint on Soviet policy has been the reluctance on the part of the various Lebanese factions to become too closely identified with Moscow. Although these factions have been responsive to Soviet arms offers as they have sought to expand their area of control in Lebanon, they realize that Syria is increasingly becoming the controlling force of Lebanon's fate and have taken care not to provoke Damascus by moving too close to the USSR. Despite these constraints, Moscow is likely to try to expand its contacts with the various factions to increase its presence and influence and avoid the past situation in which it had almost no significant contacts among the Lebanese independent of Syria.

Recent Soviet Activity and Lebanese Response

Soviet prospects in Lebanon have brightened with the withdrawal of the US Marines in 1984 and the Israeli Defense Forces this spring. Although these withdrawals magnify Syria's influence in Lebanon, they also create openings for the Soviets to build independent contacts with the various Lebanese factions. The Soviets may also hope that such contacts will give them additional leverage with Syria.

The Druze. A main target of Soviet efforts has been Walid Junblatt's Progressive Socialist Party (PSP).

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The Syrians generally have the final word on Soviet arms deliveries to the Druze, because most shipments are channeled through Syria. In the last year, however, some Soviet arms have reached the Druze directly,

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Although the Druze militia has occupied the coastal strip south of Beirut since April, it is unlikely that the Soviets, considering their past practice, would risk offending Assad by regularly shipping arms directly to the Druze.

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Training is another means of Soviet support for the PSP. Druze militiamen in the USSR reportedly have been trained in tank warfare, artillery use, infantry

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Profile of Selected Lebanese Political Groups

Group	Political Orientation	Confessional Affiliation	Leader	Militia
Progressive Socialist Party	Pro-Syrian	Druze	Walid Junblatt	7,000 to 8,000
Amal	Pro-Syrian	Shia	Nabih Barri	6,000 to 7,000
Lebanese Communist Party	Pro-Soviet	None	George Hawi	500 to 1,000
Communist Action Organization	Independent, some links to Moscow	None	Mushin Ibrahim	200 to 500
Lebanese forces	Pro-Israeli	Maronite Christian	Elie Hubayqa	4,000 to 5,000

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tactics, and flying. 25X1

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the Soviets provide educational scholarships and train political cadres. 25X1

Shia Amal. The Soviets are also building contacts with the Shia Amal movement. Its leader, Nabih Barri, recently accepted an invitation to visit the USSR at an undetermined date. He last visited Moscow in July 1984, meeting with Karen Brutents, the CPSU's top Middle Eastern specialist, and Vladimir Polyakov, head of the Foreign Ministry's Near East Department. 25X1

Amal has now opened an office in Moscow. Until recently, training was the only military assistance offered by the Soviets to Amal. However, the Soviets have reportedly made at least two arms deliveries to Amal forces this spring. For Amal, Soviet arms supplies increased in importance when Amal-Palestinian fighting broke out in May, but Amal's move against the Palestinian camps may have given Moscow second thoughts about supplying arms. 25X1

The Communists and the PLO. The Soviets have tried to expand their longstanding ties with the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) over the past three years. Moscow has helped rebuild the LCP militia since its dissolution in June 1982. 25X1

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The Communist Action Organization (CAO) also receives weapons and training assistance from the Soviets. The CAO, however, is more independent of Moscow than the LCP is, and is not recognized by the Soviets as a legitimate Communist party. 25X1

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The LCP is for the most part responsive to Moscow, mainly because it has no other means of support. The Communists are minor players in Lebanese politics; thus, visible interaction with Moscow enhances their prestige. 25X1

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Notably absent are any reports of Soviet contacts with Palestinians in Lebanon. This is a reflection of two things—the shattering of the PLO presence in Lebanon that resulted from the Israelis' 1982 invasion, and the fact that most Palestinian groups in Lebanon are Syrian-backed dissidents, with whom Moscow has had little or no contact. Closer ties with these groups would tend to compromise Soviet relations with Yasir Arafat's mainline PLO. 25X1

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The Christian Right. 25X1

Soviet overtures to the Lebanese right surfaced only recently. 25X1

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reported in the open press, was a briefing the Soviet assistant defense attache gave in February to the Christian Lebanese Forces Command Council.

The Christian leaders are probably suspicious of Moscow's approaches and are not likely to take Soviet overtures seriously. Their response probably will be a cautious flirtation for the sake of arousing the West into more active support for Christian interests in Lebanon.

Courting the Government

In addition to building contacts with the various Druze, Muslim, and Christian factions, the Soviets have been cultivating ties with the Lebanese Government. Brutents's two visits to Lebanon last year included meetings with President Gemayel, and Polyakov came to Lebanon in August 1984 to meet with Prime Minister Karami. In addition, Karami was received by Soviet Premier Nikolay Tikhonov at Chernenko's funeral in March.

Gemayel may seek Soviet contacts as potential leverage in future dealings with Syria and the United States,

Politically, the Lebanese Government is not likely to go much beyond a gradual normalization of official relations, such as last month's appointment of an ambassador to fill the long-vacant post in Moscow. Militarily, the LAF has no current need for Soviet arms, apart from ammunition for a few Soviet artillery pieces acquired in the 1970s. The Lebanese Government might nonetheless purchase some Soviet military equipment either as a political gesture to assert its nonaligned status or as a move to spur the United States into greater responsiveness to the LAF's needs.

Outlook

The Soviets are in favor of a Lebanon that is stable and responsive to Syrian interests. They are probably concerned that continuation of the present chaotic situation in Lebanon could lead to a return of Israeli troops or an increased US military presence in the region. A recent *Izvestiya* article supported former President Franjiyah's call for the return to Lebanon of the Pan-Arab (Syrian) peacekeeping forces.

At the same time, the Soviets almost certainly will continue to develop independent contacts with the various factions in Lebanon as a small step toward a greater role in the Middle East, as well as a hedge against whatever new political arrangement arises in Lebanon. Soviet capabilities to do this are limited, however, mainly because politically relevant Lebanese are aware that, in the context of the Soviets' overall Middle Eastern policy, Moscow will continue to defer to Syria on important questions in Lebanon.

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Other Topics

New Soviet Military Assistance to North Korea

Moscow's decision to provide North Korea MIG-23 Flogger fighter aircraft probably presages a stronger bilateral military relationship.

Moscow's decision to set aside a 10-year policy of not sending finished major weapon systems to North Korea underscores an interest in cultivating P'yongyang to offset China's influence in the North and to strengthen the USSR's overall position in northeast Asia.

Further development of the Soviet–North Korean military relationship will depend in large part on how each side evaluates the costs and opportunities of improved ties. The Soviets want to take advantage of cooling Sino–North Korean relations to develop new ties to P'yongyang and to counter closer relations between the United States, China, Japan, and South Korea, but they remain wary of P'yongyang's unpredictability. North Korea will try to retain its independence while seeking the support of both the USSR and China.

Delivery of MIG-23s . . .

The Soviets sent six MIG-23s to Pukch'ang Airfield in North Korea on 22 May.

The USSR transferred another 10 MIG-23s in mid-July and eventually will probably provide North Korea a regiment of 35 to 40 aircraft—the first qualitative improvement to its air force in many years.

Delivery of MIG-23s represents a dramatic change in Soviet policy toward North Korea. Over the years the Soviets have provided P'yongyang with the technology to produce tanks, antitank weapons, and surface-to-air missiles. But North Korea's tilt toward China made the Soviets reluctant to send major arms, and they had not delivered a finished major weapon system since the mid-1970s. In fact, China has provided most of North Korea's military imports since 1976, including F-6 (MIG-19) and F-7 (MIG-21) aircraft. In addition to political considerations, North Korea's inability to pay for new military equipment has made it a less attractive arms customer to the Soviets, who sell arms elsewhere in the Third World to garner needed hard currency.

. . . And Other Weapons

The Soviets recently provided North Korea with the SA-3 surface-to-air missile system. The SA-3 will give North Korea a more effective air defense system because its low-to-medium-altitude coverage complements the medium-to-high SA-2 system already in the North Korean inventory.

The Soviets probably will provide other modern weapons to North Korea.

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two North Korean TU-154 aircraft at a Soviet airfield where the Soviets were conducting an air-to-air missile demonstration—presumably for a North Korean delegation—involving both MIG-23 and MIG-25 aircraft. While the Soviets may have been demonstrating just the MIG-23 aircraft for the North Koreans, the presence of MIG-25s, strongly suggests that a MIG-25 deal is in the works. The MIG-25 is a high-altitude interceptor aircraft that the Soviets claim is capable of shooting down US SR-71 reconnaissance aircraft, which regularly fly over the Korean DMZ. The North Koreans have long been interested in acquiring such a capability.

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Impact on Military Balance

Provision of a complete MIG-23 regiment to North Korea would not greatly alter the balance of forces between North and South Korea. South Korea has 70 F-4s, which are superior to anything the North had before receiving the MIG-23s, and will take delivery next year of the first of 36 F-16s—an aircraft a generation ahead of the MIG-23 in capabilities. Soviet provision of significant numbers of MIG-23s, MIG-25s, or more advanced aircraft such as the MIG-29 over the next several years, however, could shift the balance in airpower to the North.

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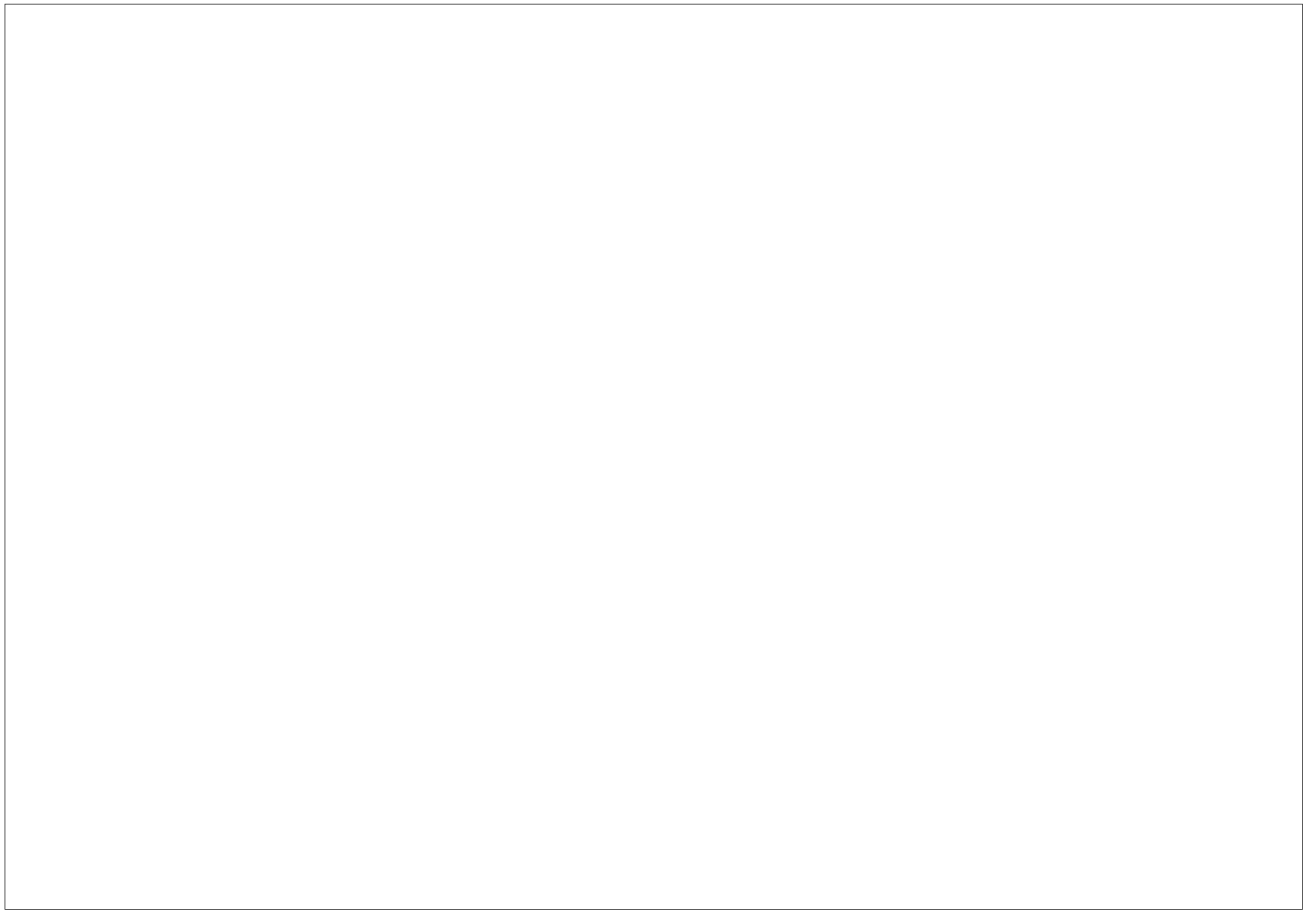

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Soviet delivery of the ZSU-23/4 self-propelled anti-aircraft gun or the mobile SAMs and more modern antitank guided missiles would further widen the quantitative and qualitative advantage the North has over South Korea in most types of ground weapons and equipment.

Soviet Gains

If North Korea agreed, Soviet bombers and naval strike aircraft, using North Korean airspace, could also have another route to exit the Sea of Japan for reconnaissance and training operations against targets in northeastern China—including bases supporting the Chinese nuclear submarine force. Soviet naval aircraft that deploy to Vietnam may use this route, instead of flying between South Korea and Japan as they do now. The Soviets probably already have worked out an arrangement that allows Soviet aircraft to use North Korean airfields for emergency purposes.

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Moreover, the Soviets may view overflight rights as a first step toward gaining routine access to North Korean airfields. Soviet reconnaissance aircraft flying from North Korea would be able to extend their coverage farther south than aircraft based in the Soviet Union. Moscow might try to overcome any North Korean resistance by arguing that the presence of Soviet aircraft in North Korea would help deter a US–South Korean attack and by promising to share the intelligence collected with the North Koreans.

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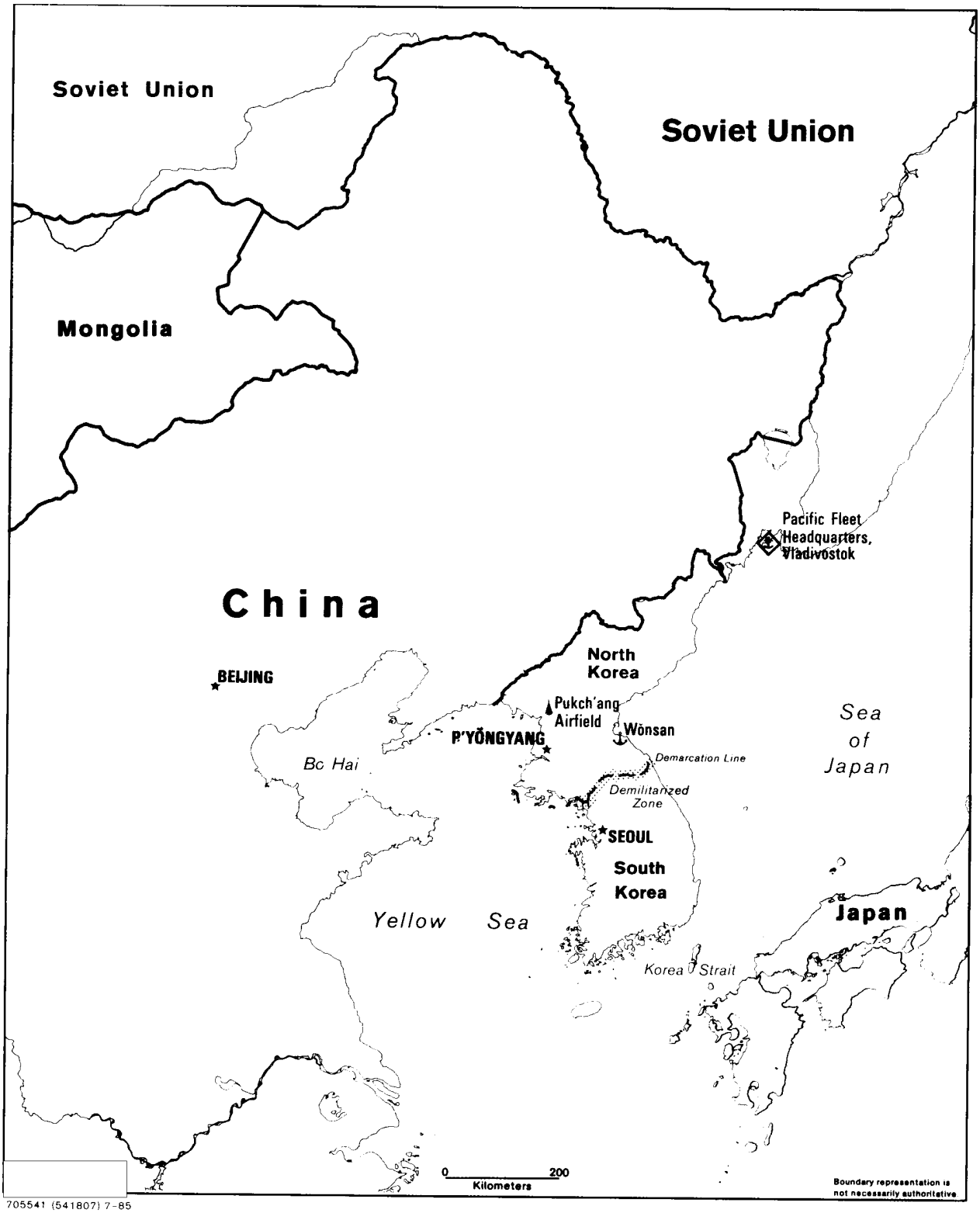

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The Soviets, however, could find North Korean demands for sophisticated weaponry and production technology an unacceptable price for such access.

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Soviet Interest in Naval Bases

The Soviets, in fact, may not feel strongly about gaining access to North Korean air and naval facilities, at least in part because of North Korea's proximity to Soviet bases in the Far East. The Soviet Pacific Fleet is headquartered in Vladivostok, only 100 nautical miles from the nearest North Korean port. Thus, North Korea is less significant as a potential asset for Soviet power projection than other, more distant areas where Moscow has sought access. Although access to ship repair facilities in North Korea would relieve the already overburdened Soviet yards at Vladivostok, North Korean ports are themselves small and crowded. No North Korean port has repair facilities to handle ships larger than a frigate.

Political calculations may also be tempering Soviet efforts to gain access to North Korean facilities. The Soviets are aware that North Korea has been adamantly opposed to granting any foreign power anything that might look like concession of sovereignty. They may calculate that exerting too much pressure on P'yongyang could backfire, alienating the North Koreans and producing a significant setback to Soviet efforts to cultivate a better overall relationship.

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At the same time, despite political disincentives and the lack of appeal from an operational perspective, the Soviets could be interested in gaining some type of limited access. For instance, they might hope to use port calls as a wedge to gain eventual permission to use North Korean repair facilities, if only for Soviet auxiliary ships.

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Outlook

The delivery of MIG-23s to North Korea reflects Soviet interest in asserting a stronger voice in the region's affairs. The Soviets clearly want to demonstrate a capability and willingness to support an ally militarily in the face of a perceived effort by the United States to strengthen its military position in northeast Asia. In the context of the military balance on the Korean Peninsula, the USSR probably wants, at a minimum, to counter South Korea's acquisition of F-16s in 1986.

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Moscow's new policy toward North Korea almost certainly will entail provision of other modern military equipment. The Soviets probably believe that delivery of new arms will ensure continued North Korean cooperation in Soviet intelligence collection flights and possibly pave the way for eventual air and naval access. But Moscow will have to assess how much modern military equipment is enough to demonstrate support without leading North Korea to believe it has Soviet backing to attack the South.

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Soviet-Vietnamese Relations: Pursuing Common Interests

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Ten years after the end of the Vietnam war, Soviet-Vietnamese relations in many respects mirror the Soviet-Cuban relationship. As Communist regimes dependent on Moscow for economic survival and military aid, both Cuba and Vietnam are members of CEMA, are aligned with the Kremlin in party and foreign policy, and lie in the "backyard" of one of the USSR's chief adversaries. Moscow's relations with both countries are driven by the pursuit of mutual interests through cooperative policies, attempts by each country to maximize its leverage within the relationship, and adjustments to the strains of complex interaction.

Both Moscow and Hanoi benefit from their cooperative policies. Hanoi gains combat aircraft, tanks, military advisers, and financial military support of about $800 million annually to modernize its armed forces. The Vietnamese also receive ships for coastal defense and antisubmarine warfare (ASW) and participate in joint ASW training exercises with Soviet naval units at Cam Ranh Bay about once every 18 months. Soviet economic aid to Vietnam averages about $3 million per day (compared to $11 million per day for Cuba) and has been a vital force in shoring up Hanoi's deteriorating economy, especially following imposition of a trade embargo by most Western countries after Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in December 1978.

Moscow, in turn, has exploited Hanoi's national security vulnerabilities. At Hanoi's request the Soviets signed a friendship and cooperation treaty with Vietnam in 1978. Since the Chinese incursions into Vietnam in early 1979, Moscow has used Cam Ranh Bay to deploy Badger TU-16 strike bombers, Bear D long-range reconnaissance aircraft, and Bear F ASW aircraft. A squadron of MIG-23 interceptors was deployed last year to protect the Cam Ranh complex. Cam Ranh has become a significant communications and intelligence-gathering facility as well as a naval base for 20 to 30 Soviet ships—the largest concentration of ships regularly stationed overseas. The Soviet Navy uses Cam Ranh Bay not only for surface ships and submarines plying the South China Sea but also for vessels transiting between the Far East and the Indian Ocean.

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The Soviets probably support Vietnam's interest in improved relations with the United States. Moscow could expect a lighter economic burden from its Vietnamese ties should Hanoi gain access to US aid and trade and thereby open new trade opportunities with Japan and other Western countries. Openings to the United States would undercut opposition by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to Soviet-backed Vietnamese control in Laos and Cambodia. Moscow would hope to gain from any Vietnamese use of US links to counter the Chinese in Southeast Asian regional politics. It would not be pleased, however, if Hanoi were to use improved relations with the United States to exert leverage against the USSR.

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Support for Policy Goals

Vietnam's geographic location on China's southern flank serves Moscow's security needs and power-projection goals. Vietnam promotes Soviet interests by:

- Affording the Soviets a platform for air, naval, communications, and intelligence-gathering capabilities that expands their power in Asia, the Pacific, and the Indian Ocean.

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- Placing the Soviets in a position to interdict the flow of traffic along the sea lanes of Southeast Asia.
- Checking US influence in Southeast Asia, attempting to intimidate US allies, and containing China by securing dominance over Cambodia and Laos and creating a regional balance of power more amenable to Moscow.
- Enabling the Soviets to enlarge their own influence in Cambodia and Laos.

- Diverting Chinese military resources and attention away from the Sino-Soviet border.

- Helping to open up Soviet access to the South Pacific for future penetration of the region—Fiji, Tonga, Western Somoa, and Papua New Guinea, all of which have ports that could accommodate the Soviet Navy. This would deny the West, Japan, and China a zone of exclusive influence.

For its part, Vietnam has so far succeeded in drawing upon Soviet support to promote its own policy goals. Moscow's economic and military support provides a crucial deterrent to major Chinese military action against Vietnam and helps Vietnam combat Chinese shelling and minor incursions, which have continued since the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in February 1979. Moscow backs Hanoi's overthrow of the Khmer Rouge regime in Phnom Penh and the drive for a regional settlement in Cambodia favorable to Vietnam's long-term nationalist goal of hegemony in Indochina. Soviet support maintains the viability of the Soviet-style centrally planned Vietnamese economy, ensuring a steady flow of essential goods, and enhances the survivability of the Vietnamese leadership.

Sources of Continuing Discord in the Relationship

Soviet-Vietnamese relations, like the Moscow-Havana relationship, have not been without strain. While the Vietnamese have used Soviet aid to advance their interests, they deeply resent their dependence on any country. Hanoi's nationalistic frustrations are heightened by the knowledge that Vietnam fell into the Soviet embrace because of its need to acquire an ally against China, pursue regional goals, and support economic recovery. The Vietnamese are suspicious about improvements in Sino-Soviet relations, which they fear could lead to reduced Soviet aid and a sellout by Moscow of Vietnam's interests. They also want more advanced weapons from the Soviets, such as MIG-23s. The Soviets have been unwilling to provide such weapons, probably believing that Hanoi might use them to create unacceptable risks for Moscow by aggressive actions against China or in pursuit of Cambodian resistance fighters near Thailand's border. Vietnam's use of Soviet-built tanks and heavy artillery against Cambodian resistance fighters has already created strong anti-Soviet sentiments among some members of ASEAN, especially Thailand and Singapore. 25X1

The Soviet-Vietnamese relationship has gone through several periods of discord. Vietnamese resentment of Soviet actions date as far back as the Geneva Agreement of 1954, when Moscow failed to push for a unified Vietnam. Strains occurred repeatedly during 25X1
the 1960s, because Hanoi never believed the Soviets sufficiently supported their cause. 25X1
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the Vietnamese have 25X1
not forgotten that the Soviet Union did little to help during the Vietnam war when the United States blockaded North Vietnamese ports and harbors. 25X1
in recent years the Soviet Union has 25X1
repeatedly complained that its aid to Vietnam was not being used effectively—which could be seen as a threat that aid would be reduced. 25X1

Soviet arrogance and heavyhanded opportunism, joined with Vietnamese ethnocentrism and nationalism, spawn a persistent current of conflict. Sharp reductions in Soviet economic aid in 1980, combined with oil price rises in 1981, have fueled these underlying strains, as have political conflicts caused by the 25X1
growing Soviet presence in Laos and Cambodia since the early 1980s. Key sources of current friction include:

- Moscow's reluctance to provide more advanced military equipment and Moscow's desire for a more permanent arrangement at Cam Ranh Bay.

- Vietnam's perception that its relations with the Soviets are a function of Soviet-Chinese relations, which creates uneasiness in Hanoi regarding Moscow's efforts to improve relations with Beijing.

- Strains between the Soviet Union and Vietnam over who should exert greater control in advising the Lao regarding long-term planning.

- Perceptions by individual Vietnamese that they cannot do business with the Soviets, who are "ungenerous" and usually unwilling to deal in the local black market or with shop and sidewalk merchants.

- Moscow's displeasure with what it perceives as Vietnam's economic mismanagement and low rate of economic growth, lack of interest in Soviet aid projects, lackadaisical attitude toward work, and rejection of even "friendly guidance and advice."

Still, it would be a mistake to interpret such strains as indicating an interest by either Hanoi or Moscow in weakening the relationship. The Chinese threat ensures a continuing Vietnamese interest in the alliance with Moscow, and the Soviets apparently perceive the benefits of their Vietnam ties to far outweigh the costs.

While General Secretary Gorbachev has accelerated efforts to improve relations with China, he has been extremely careful to assure the Vietnamese of continued Soviet support for Hanoi and its Indo-Chinese allies. Unlike Chernenko, Gorbachev has been outspoken in giving direct support to the Vietnamese in Cambodia

Prospects

The Soviets probably will continue to try to improve the atmospherics of Sino-Soviet relations, while reassuring their Vietnamese clients. This reassurance is likely to consist of support for Hanoi's position in Cambodia, continued high levels of economic aid, and substantial deliveries of military equipment to the Vietnamese Government. Moscow has agreed to grant Hanoi new credits during the period 1986-90 on easier repayment terms, to reschedule repayment of earlier credits, and to increase exports of goods to meet Hanoi's "urgent needs." Hanoi has pledged in return to strive to fulfill its export commitments under existing bilateral agreements and to increase exports of rubber and other commodities of particular interest to the Soviets. Moscow probably believes that the negative reactions of ASEAN to Soviet support of Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia and the irritant of Vietnam in the Sino-Soviet relationship are a tolerable price to pay for the strategic benefits of Cam Ranh. 25X1

Because Sino-Soviet relations probably will not change rapidly under Gorbachev, despite periods of seemingly warmer contacts between Moscow and Beijing, the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship will remain intact. Continuing border tension between Vietnam and China, combined with Vietnam's regional aspirations in Southeast Asia, will reinforce Hanoi's need for Soviet military, political, diplomatic, and economic support. Soviet privileges in Cam Ranh Bay, combined with Vietnamese regional activities that divert Chinese resources, shore up the relationship from Moscow's perspective. 25X1 25X1

Soviet efforts to improve relations with China will continue to cause uneasiness in Hanoi. Vietnam fears a warmer Sino-Soviet relationship will undermine its close ties to the Soviets and thus undercut its current efforts to consolidate its control of Indochina. These fears generate the need for political reassurances from Moscow, as indicated by high-level Vietnamese visits to the Soviet Union as counterparts to Soviet-Chinese trade and political talks. Le Duan's visit to Moscow in June 1985, when the Soviets announced they would boost aid to Vietnam and reschedule outstanding debts, is a case in point. Future negotiations over Cam Ranh Bay offer Vietnam additional leverage to ensure Soviet economic and military commitments even in the context of warming Soviet relations with China. 25X1 25X1 25X1

Should China seek to teach Vietnam a "second lesson" by invading northern Vietnam as it did in 1979, Moscow probably would respond favorably to a request from Hanoi for increased military advisory assistance and financial support to modernize the Vietnamese forces. Moscow might pursue other policies designed to back Vietnam, such as threatening activity on the Sino-Soviet border or stepped-up activity by Soviet assets in Cam Ranh Bay. These actions would reduce strains in the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship. 25X1

While no significant breakdown in the Soviet-Vietnamese relationship is on the horizon, the ebb and flow of relations will probably continue to induce substantial strains. Discord is likely to result from:

- Hanoi's rising debt with Moscow and increased Soviet insistence that its debts be paid.
- Any further deterioration of Vietnam's economy and Soviet demands for corrective action.
- Growing complaints from Vietnamese personnel sent to work in Eastern Europe or the USSR to help pay off Vietnam's debt.
- Soviet Bloc dumping of used or second-rate military equipment on Vietnam and the need for Hanoi to compensate for Soviet aid in the form of prime goods sent to the USSR.

Implications for US Interests

The Soviet-Vietnamese relationship and adversarial Sino-Soviet activities offer opportunities to strengthen US strategic involvement in Asia. China's perception of encirclement by enemies creates a favorable atmosphere for continued improvement in US-Chinese relations. Likewise, continued Soviet-Vietnamese ties are likely to provide the United States with opportunities for:

- Developing closer coordination with the ASEAN countries, particularly Thailand and Singapore.
- Forging closer US-Japanese-Chinese security relations to counter the expansion of Soviet military power in the Far East.
- Extending cooperation on issues that involve ASEAN-Japanese relations in opposition to Soviet-Vietnamese ambitions in Southeast Asia.
- Reinforcing Indonesia's underlying insecurities regarding Marxism/Leninism—a possible avenue for leverage, although Indonesia is more anxious about China than about the USSR.

Pursuit of these opportunities could be complicated by Soviet efforts to:

- Communicate a greater interest in normalizing relations with China without reducing support for the Vietnamese, by showing a willingness to address China's security concerns, including making modest Soviet troop cutbacks on the Sino-Soviet border, or dealing with the Chinese more positively on Mongolia.
- Push the Vietnamese leaders toward normalization of relations with China or toward a negotiated settlement on Cambodia.
- Exploit regional awareness of the growing Soviet presence at Cam Ranh as a means of encouraging opposition in the Philippines to US bases—implicitly targets for Soviet nuclear attack—and fostering regional interest in a Pacific nuclear free zone.
- Increase the bidding for Soviet commercial access to the small islands of the South Pacific, for example, Kiribati and Tuvalu.

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But Moscow's attempts to improve its position in the Soviet-Chinese-US triangular relationship will be conditioned by Vietnam's intense nationalism, commitment to power projection in Cambodia and Laos, and historic conflict with China. Hanoi will not easily be moved by Soviet manipulation that advances Moscow's interests at the expense of Vietnam. Nor will Moscow lightly trade away its assets in Cam Ranh Bay for rapprochement in Sino-Soviet relations; indeed, it is likely to see retention of these assets as a means to induce Beijing to adopt a more accommodating posture.

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Soviet Ground Forces in Afghanistan: The Battalion Perspective

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The war in Afghanistan is not a war of armies and divisions, but rather one of battalions and companies. Small-scale combat operations are the norm, and campaigns such as the 20,000-man offensive into the Panjsher Valley in April and May 1984 are rare exceptions. The extent to which the Soviets can cope with the insurgency is therefore determined not so much by the number of divisions or the total number of personnel deployed in Afghanistan as by the number of combat maneuver battalions that can be brought to bear against the insurgents. The battalion perspective, therefore, helps to highlight the capabilities and weaknesses of the Soviet expeditionary army in Afghanistan.

Soviet Combat Maneuver Battalions in Afghanistan

Type	Number	Manpower (Approximate)	Total Troops
Totals	**110**		**41,800**
Motorized rifle	43	450	19,350
Tank	18	200	3,600
Airborne/air assault	17	350	5,950
KGB mobile maneuver groups	12	250	3,000
Independent security	10	500	5,000
Special-purpose (spetsnaz)	7	550	3,850
Reconnaissance	3	350	1,050

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The Combat Battalions

About 60 percent of the approximately 117,000 Soviet troops in Afghanistan are in Ground Forces combat units. KGB Border Troop mobile maneuver groups—which conduct combat operations and are of approximately battalion size—make up another 1 percent of the total. Together these forces comprise 110 maneuver battalions, 37 fire support battalions, and miscellaneous smaller combat and support elements within the divisions and regiments. These units vary in size and capability, and some have clearly defined security missions that limit their ability to conduct active counterinsurgency operations.[1]

Elements from different battalions are frequently combined into "task forces" for combat operations. A motorized rifle battalion, for example, may be reinforced by a tank company, an artillery battery, and other supporting elements. This kind of task organization is practiced at lower levels too—a motorized rifle company may receive a tank platoon and other support for an operation. In general,

-perhaps two companies of one battalion supported by a company from another unit. This means that most combat actions involve only a few hundred troops, and many smaller operations—involving as few as 20 to 40 men—are also conducted.

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Geographic Distribution of the Combat Force

The disposition of these units in Afghanistan reflects Soviet objectives and perceptions of the threat. About 63 percent of the combat battalions are based in the northeast quarter of the country—an area that includes Kabul, the main highway from the USSR to the Afghan capital, the major infiltration routes from Pakistan, and the most difficult operational terrain in the country. This heavy commitment of resources reflects the Soviet emphasis on maintaining the semblance of a functioning central government and the military assessment that the insurgent threat is greatest in this region. About 10 percent of the maneuver battalions are located in the southeast, 16 percent in the southwest, and 11 percent in the northwest.

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[1] We estimate the insurgent forces at about 150,000 full- or part-time guerrillas. Most are organized into small independent bands of 30 to 50 men armed with rifles, heavy machineguns, antitank rockets, and some light fire support weapons such as 82-mm mortars and 107-mm rockets.

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Since the beginning of the year, six battalions have been added to Soviet forces in western Afghanistan and two have been assigned to the eastern part of the country. The commitment of the bulk of this spring's augmentation to the west suggests that the Soviets realized their forces there were insufficient to counter the persistent insurgent threat in this vast area. Nevertheless, the west remains of secondary importance to the Soviets.

Soviet forces are based near the major cities and airfields and along the lines of communication. They generally deploy out of regiment-sized base camps to conduct combat actions ranging in duration from a few days to a few weeks. A few base areas, such as Bagram and Shindand, have larger groupings of forces, and a number, such as Bamian, Chagcharan, and the KGB Border Troop sites, are of battalion size.

Degradation of Combat Strength

Administrative and operational factors degrade the capabilities of the 110 combat battalions to conduct offensive counterinsurgency operations. Among the most important administrative factors are difficulties in keeping the force manned and coping with noncombat (primarily disease) casualties.

Whatever the manning level of a given unit, the number of personnel actually available for duty will vary from day to day. The most likely reasons assigned personnel might not be available for duty on a particular day would be detachments for duty elsewhere (TDY), administrative lags in replacing combat losses, and noncombat medical problems. In this regard, degradation of combat potential due to disease casualties—especially hepatitis—has probably been the most serious drain on personnel.

Combat potential is further degraded by operational considerations—primarily the requirement to provide security for major bases and lines of communication. Ten of the 110 combat battalions (the independent security battalions) have this specific task and are not generally considered to be engaged actively in counterinsurgency operations. Assessing how much effort other combat units are required to devote to this task is more difficult. 25X1

In general, base security appears to involve units other than the maneuver battalions, for example, artillery, air defense, and antitank units. Some tanks and armored personnel carriers are also seen on base security duty, but these are generally few in number. Most combat battalions when not on an operation are parked in administrative areas and patterns within their base camps that suggest these units are available for operations. This judgment is supported by the recurring deployment of major elements of these units to the field for combat. 25X1 25X1

The Soviets attempt to maintain security along the major lines of communication through the use of fixed security posts and convoy escorts. A Soviet traffic control brigade has primary responsibility for this mission, but some combat units probably are involved. 25X1

some combat battalions may be assigned such duties on a rotational basis. four to six battalions may be involved in line-of-communications security at any one time. 25X1 25X1

Strengths and Weaknesses 25X1

Although the Soviet combat units are unable to maintain a countrywide presence or constant pressure on the insurgents, the force is a flexible one and is capable of conducting a relatively large number of widespread independent operations. Given the number of maneuver battalions in the country, the Soviets' economy-of-force approach to the war, and their emphasis on keeping their casualties as low as possible, it is doubtful that availability of combat units has been a major constraint on Soviet operations. More serious limitations have probably included inefficient administrative and logistic support, poor intelligence, and inadequate training and preparation for combat. 25X1 25X1

Battalion-sized operations give the Soviets the capability to attain local force superiority in men and firepower over most insurgent groups, which generally number only about 30 to 50 men. In addition to

organic battalion firepower, the Soviets have the force multipliers of mobility—provided especially by helicopters—and additional fire support provided by regimental, divisional, and army artillery and by airpower. The 37 fire support battalions in the 40th Army, for example, give the Soviets over 100 artillery batteries (usually six weapons each) to employ against the insurgents. Many of these batteries can support combat operations without having to deploy from their base areas—a factor that enhances security and timeliness of support. Smaller operations involving less than a battalion can be mounted to gather intelligence, interdict insurgent supplies, and harass rebel bands.

Soviet operations since the intervention have appeared to be a mix of smaller, "quick-reaction" combat actions and longer term, more carefully planned forays against major insurgent strongholds. There is some degree of "tension" between these two approaches. At issue is whether the Soviets could utilize their combat forces more intensively, conducting more frequent and/or more protracted operations, and whether such a course of action would be worthwhile. More intensive use of the force could increase rebel attrition (although at greater "cost" than the Soviets may want to pay), but this probably would not overcome the inability of the Soviets or their Afghan allies to maintain control in areas that had been "cleared."

The combat force's effectiveness has been reduced by a variety of factors—objective ones such as weather and terrain as well as subjective considerations like leadership, training, and discipline. Soviet inability to create and operate efficiently with a loyal Afghan government force and to obtain accurate and timely intelligence on insurgent activities has also degraded operational effectiveness.

Implications

Although the consolidation of Afghan government authority clearly is a major goal, Soviet combat forces are only capable of conducting a campaign of attrition against the insurgents. Soviet forces have made limited efforts to maintain a consolidating presence in certain strategic areas such as the Panjsher Valley, but, by and large, they do not have the combat forces to garrison wide areas of the countryside. Soviet maneuver units do, however, have the capability to gain local force superiority over most insurgent groups, and, using tactical and strategic mobility, the Soviets can transfer forces and focus their efforts in widely separated areas against the fragmented Afghan resistance. 25X1

Any further augmentation of the Soviet army in Afghanistan probably would emphasize combat versus support elements, to the extent possible. There undoubtedly are limits to the capability of the current infrastructure to support additional combat units, and intermittent shortages of fuel and ammunition occasionally restrict combat operations. Nevertheless, augmentations in 1984 and thus far in 1985 have added 11 combat battalions plus one fire support battalion to the force without any significant increase in the command-logistic infrastructure, and additional increases of this kind are possible. 25X1 25X1 25X1 25X1 25X1

The Soviets could also enhance their ground combat capability in other ways, such as by reducing illness rates, manning the force at higher levels, deploying better equipment—especially improved artillery—or through more intensive use of their forces. Because of such potential, their capabilities to inflict casualties on the insurgents will probably improve even if their numbers do not increase substantially. 25X1 25X1

Under their current "minimalist" approach, however, the Soviets will have to depend on the reconstitution of effective Afghan military forces or the collapse of the insurgency to extend government control beyond a tenuous grip on main towns and lines of communication. Neither of these events is likely to occur in the short term. Soviet combat forces, therefore, will continue to bear the brunt of the fighting. 25X1 25X1 25X1

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